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THE OBSERVATOR.

Of Inſtructions given to Members of Parliament. Of the Antient Cuſtoms of Parliament. Of Committees of Priviledges and Elections, of Grievances, of Religion and Trade, with Remarks on ſuch Committees.

From Saturday June the 16th, to Wednesday June the 20th, 1705.

Country-m. MAſter *Obſervator*, the Elections are now quite over, and I have obſerved that ſeveral of the Corporations have given *Inſtructions* to their Members how to Act in Parliament. Is it Cuſtomary ſo to do? Some ſay 'tis not; and that 'tis an *Error*.

Obſ. It has been the Antient Practice of the Electors ſo to do; and very often, when any *New Unwonted Difficulties* have occur'd in the Houſe, it has been uſual for the Members to aſk Advice of their Burroughs, and as often have the Burroughs ſent *Inſtructions* to their Members when ſitting, Signed by the Major part of the Electors. For our Antient Parliaments held a good Correſpondence with their Electors; and all our Hiſtories, ſince the Original of Parliaments, which is as Old as our *Conſtitution*, cannot afford us an Inſtance of ſuch a Miſunderſtanding as happened in the laſt Parliament.

I have read ſeveral *Inſtructions* given to the new Elected Members; but, as I remember, all of 'em Deficient in two Material Points. 1. In not requiring them to be preſent the firſt Day of Seſſion at the Choice of a *Speaker*. 2. In not requiring their *Attendance conſtantly* in the Service of the Houſe. But this, I hope, is not too late to be done.

I wonder how theſe two Material Points came to be overlook'd. On the Choice of a *Speaker* depends, in a great Meaſure, the Succeſs of the Seſſions. It is unknown the ways a *Speaker* has to Influence the Houſe either for the *Good* or *Detriment* of the *Queen* and *Realm*. The Parliament is Govern'd by its own *Cuſtoms*; and the Influence of a *Speaker*, according to the uſage of Parliament, is very great.

If my Advice may take place, I would have you perſwade your Members to chuſe no one for a *Speaker*, but ſuch a one as is of *no Party*, and *Intirely in the Intereſt of the Queen and Realm*. Let him be then *Courtier*, or *Countryman*, 'tis all one to me. You know, *Roger*, I have often wiſh'd the *Self denial* Bill had paſs'd in the late Reign. But we have had ſo much Experience of the *Integrity* of the *Courtiers* in the late Parliament, that if one of 'em be put up for a *Speaker*, I would not have him refuſed meerly upon that Account.

Nor do I wiſh it, but upon one Account, to ſee how far Men may *Alter*, *Change*, and *Rechange* their Opinions. I remember when that Worthy Unſpotted Gentleman, Sir *Thomas Littleton*, was put up for a Speaker, *What*, ſaid ſome of my Friends, *will you chuſe a* Courtier *for a* Speaker? *Will you have the Mouth of the Houſe of Commons brib'd againſt it ſelf?* Yet theſe Gentlemen have been of another Opinion ſince; and, perhaps, may come to their Old Opinion again, according as the Wind and Tide of *Intereſt* may ſit.

Not to oblige their Members to attend the Houſe is certainly an Omiſſion. The *Non-Attendance* of the Members has often given Opportunity to Parties in the Houſe to gain *Votes* and *Reſolutions* in a *Thin Aſſembly*, which they could not have done in *Full Parliament*. And to prevent theſe *Clandeſtine Votes* and *Reſolves*, our Anceſtors us'd never to Debate any Material Point but in a *Full Houſe*, and therefore the Old Books ſay, ſuch or ſuch a thing was Concluded and Reſolved in *Full Parliament*, 'tis the common and uſual Expreſſion in *Full Parliament*.

The many Excuſes of ſome to Deſert the Service of the Houſe, ſhows, that they take that *Great Concern* upon themſelves, only as a *Feather* in the *Cap*, a *Honorary Title*; and they are ſo ready to give one another Leave of Abſence, and ſo backwards in Puniſhing Deſerters, becauſe they don't know the occaſion themſelves may have for the ſame Licenſe. But certainly no Leave ought to be given for Abſenting the Service of the Houſe, without ſpecial Enquiry into the Neceſſity of the Petition. For, I believe, it may often happen with Members of Parliament, as it did with the old Abbot of *Crowland*, who was Eſſoign'd *de Malolecti*, and was found by the Enquirers upon the Road.

It is certainly the Right of *Engliſhmen* to know what their Repreſentatives are doing, otherwiſe it might be with'd the *Votes* were not Printed; for then one half of the Houſe would not know what the other half did, and ſo would be obliged to attend for their own Information: Whereas now they can read the *Votes*, and thereby ſee the Adjournments of Buſineſs, and ſo ſhape their time as to attend when the Affairs of their *Party* or their *Friends* comes on.

I cannot fathom the Conſciences of ſome Men, who get themſelves Elected, knowing their own *Incapacity*, by Reaſon of *Private* or *Publick* Buſineſs, which may prevent their Attendance, and few Ages have afforded many Men that have prefer'd the *Publick* to *their own Private* Concerns.

Therefore it could be with'd that the Houſe did meet ſome time before the Seſſions for Buſineſs, that all Diſputes about *Undue Returns* and *Elections*, might be firſt over, and *Writs* Iſſued out for *New Elections*, where former *Elections* have been declared void; this would be a means to have all Bills paſs'd by the due Repreſentative of the whole Kingdom.

Our Parliaments to this Day keep up the *Form*, or *Shew* at leaſt, of the *Antient Parliaments*, in appointing *Stated Committees*, and the Days when they are to ſit; but thoſe Days, I think never come, ſave that for *Elections* and *Priviledges*, tho' the others are full as Neceſſary, and of as great Moment.

It would be a great eaſe to the Minds of the Electors, and tend much to the Rectitude of Parliaments,

ments, if the Diſputes about *Undue Elections* were adjuſted before the Houſe proceeds to the Conſideration of *Publick Affairs*, for it may ſo happen that a Material Bill may be paſs'd by the *Suffrage* and *Caſting Vote* of ſuch as have no Right to ſit in the Houſe, and are afterwards declared *Unduly Elected*.

We have always a *Committee of Grievances* appointed, and the Day on which it is to ſit, but that Day never came in my Memory, which ſhows how much Parliaments are ſwerved from the Antient *Modus* and *Uſage* of our Anceſtors, who did agree to this, *That a Parliament ſhould not be Diſſolved till all Petitions were diſcuſs'd and anſwer'd*; and that after all, there ſhould be Proclamation made in ſome open place, *Whether any had a Petition, or Juſt Addreſs to the Parliament?* And if none reply'd, then it was to be Diſſolved.

It is one great Buſineſs of Parliament to enquire into *Cheats* and *Embezelments* of *Publick Officers*; for they are the Auditors of the Accounts of the whole Kingdom; and as they raiſe the Money for the *Publick Service* on the Eſtates of the Perſons they Repreſent, ſo they in *Duty*, *Juſtice* and *Equity* to their Electors, are bound to enquire whether the ſame has been apply'd as Appropriated in the Acts.

I don't ſay but Enquiry has been often made by calling for the Accounts, which perhaps have appear'd fair enough, and yet *Miſapplications* and *Embezelments* have been made, which would have fully appeared, had Complaints been received, for 'tis impoſſible that Country Gentlemen, who are altogether unacquainted with the Tricks of *Offices*, ſhould ever find out the Falſhood of a Fair Account.

You'll ſay *this is very Incongruous, and a meer Myſtery*; but I will give you an Inſtance how it may be, and that in the *Victualling*; which, for the good of the *Sailors*, I hope, will one time or other happen to be under a good Management.

Suppoſe I am employ'd in the *Victualling* to have the Care of the *Fleſh*, the *Beef* and *Pork*. According to the Cuſtom of the Navy, I am to cut 26 pieces for every groſs Hundred Weight of *Beef*, and 52 pieces for every Hundred weight of *Pork*, four Pound of *Beef*, and two Pound of *Pork* being the *Meſs-Pieces* allowed the *Sailors* by the Government, and for which the Nation Pays.

Now, ſuppoſe I am to cut 100 *Oxen* for the Service, and I take 5 or 6 of theſe *Oxen* for my own uſe, you'll ſay theſe *Oxen* will be miſſing; I ſay no; for I am to Account by *Pieces* and not by *Weight*; and to be ſure I'll make out my *Pieces*, by cutting 28, 30, or more Pieces to the Hundred weight, and the *Meſſers* themſelves ſhan't know whether I cut over or under. And if the *Sailors* are Rob'd but of 2 Ounces in a *Meſs-Piece*, what a great Sum of Money does this amount to in 600 *Oxen* and 2000 *Hogs*, the uſual Killing in one Year in one Office.

Here's a *Fair Foul Account*. And how ſhall the Foulneſs of it appear? The *Sailors* that are Cheated can't come to complain; The People that complain for 'em are abuſed and called *Informers* for their Pains by the Men in *Offices*. How then can it be done? No way that I know of but by the Method of our Anceſtors, in a *Committee of Grievances*.

I could ſay more on this Head, and, perhaps, to as little purpoſe as I have often ſpoken; but *I* can tell thee this, Honeſt *Country-man*, the *Engliſh* Nation has oftner than once been at the Brink of *Ruin* for want of a *Committee of Grievances*; and it has been my Obſervation that the *High Flying Tacking Party* have always oppoſed theſe Juſt Enquiries.

And tho', perhaps many of our *Officers* have much cleaner Hands than in ſome former Reigns, yet ſuch a *Committee*, conſtantly ſitting, and doing Buſineſs during the *Seſſion* of *Parliament*, would awe Men in *Publick Offices*. However, 'tis but *Equitable* that the Diſtreſſed People of *England* ſhould have a recourſe for *Juſtice* to ſome place where the *Judges* are not *Parties*.

We have another *Committee*, viz. of *Religion*, appointed every *Seſſions* which never yet ſate in my Memory. 'Tis true, the *Church* was never in leſs Danger than at preſent, we having a Queen *Intirely* in its *Intereſt*, and one that has gain'd the Hearts of all *Parties*; by Her the *Church* is ſecured in its *Rights*, and the *Diſſenters* in their *Liberty of Conſcience*. But, perhaps, the *Vices* and *Prophanneſs* of this preſent Age has given *Piety* ſuch Mortal Wounds, that nothing but a *Committee of Religion*, or *Parliamentary Medicines* can Cure; for when *Religion* lies a Bleeding under the very *Walls* of the *Church*, 'tis high time to find out more than ordinary *Stipticks*.

The *Difference betwixt the two Houſes of Convocation* has leſſened the Credit of *Religion* in the eſteem of ſuch Men as do not diſtinguiſh betwixt the *Religion* and the *Perſons* that Profeſs it: But much more the Management of the *Tacking Clergy* in the late Elections.

Therefore it ſeems Reaſonable, that the *Committee of Religion* be reviv'd, and ſome good Bill paſs'd which may keep the *Clergy* in their proper *Stations*, and render them incapable of intermedling with *Elections*, otherwiſe we meet with an Oppreſſion which our Forefathers knew not, and which will be our Blemiſh to Poſterity.

I could here ſpeak to another *Committee*, which, in my time, never ſare to do Buſineſs, viz. *That of Trade*, but *I* have ſpoken too much of *Trade* and *Navigation* already, and for doing of which, not long ago, Twelve *Tradeſmen* of the City of *London* found me Guilty of *Compoſing and Publiſhing a Seditious Libel*, God forgive 'em, *Si Populus vult decipi deciptatur*; if the *Traders* are Mad, *I* can't help it, and if *I* could, *I* have the leaſt Reaſon to do it of any Man living.

Country-m. One time or other the People will ſee the *Service* you have done the *Queen* and *Realm*: *I* ſee it already, and ſo do all Honeſt Men. Here *Joan*! Maſter *Obſervator*'s good Health and ſo to Bed.

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